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# COMMENTARIES

VOLUME VI

THE LOVECRAFT COLLECTORS LIBRARY

EDITED BY GEORGE WETZEL

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C O M M E N T A R I E S

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# COMMENTARIES

VOLUME SIX  
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SSR  
1955

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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"A few Memories," from OLYMPIAN, Autumn, 1940

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E. A. EDKINS

## IDIOSYNCRACIES OF HPL

Howard Lovecraft's patronymic was peculiarly felicitous; he loved his craft with a consuming passion and his craft was writing. It dominated his life, and may have hastened the untimely end of his promising career.

I think that the more notable talents and characteristics of Lovecraft's many-sided activities are best exemplified in his letters, a collection of which has been announced for publication by Dorseth and Wandrei, supplementing their recent edition of his weird tales. All but one or two of the considerable number of letters that I have received from him have been either lost or passed on to others, but I have a keen recollection of their archaic urbanity and charm. His microscopic handwriting with its individualized alphabetic forms, its Poesque economy of space, and its skyrocketing marginal interpolations at times created the impression of a mediaeval black letter manuscript in process of violent revision; or again, in one of his Georgian moods, sprouted s's that looked like f's, or even reverted to Chaucerian simplicities. In letters addressed to me the date line was always quaintly latinized, though sometimes identified by some such reference as "St. Swithin's Day", or, if the weather happened to be inclement, as "Dies Infaustus"; his invariable salutation was "O Stylus!" and his signature "Yr. Obt. Svt. Stylites Senax". It was also a Lovecraftian foible to affect such eighteenth century forms of spelling as "characteristics", "shew" for "shown", etc. These idiosyncracies were probably confined to his intimate correspondence, — a gesture of friendly ease, as when a host receives you in dressing gown and slippers for an evening of informal fireside discussion. In effect, it denoted a sort of dry humor, a scholastic venture in jocosity. Lovecraft was not much given to humor; he could twinkle over Rabelais and enjoy the drolleries of Sterne, Smollet, and Fielding, but his attitude towards the risque was rather austere.

No monk in his cell was ever more withdrawn from the excitements and occupations of ordinary life than that beaked and bony dreamer, sitting in his aerie on "the ancient Hill". Yet such was the scope of his intellectual curiosity that he even developed an academic interest in government and a singularly romantic conception of the New Deal, gorgeously complicated with Utopian ideologies that would have astonished even Mr. Roosevelt, who, in Lovecraft's opinion, was about to produce an authentic Millennium out of his presidential hat. The embroideries contributed by Lovecraft included adequate provisions for indigent gentlemen and scholars, baronial largesse for the peasantry, liberal endowments for those desiring to practice the arts and sciences, a stiff educational test for voters, and the gradual substitution of an aristocracy of intellect for the present aristocracy of wealth. We discussed these alluring ideas in the course of many let-



ters extending over a period of six or seven years, without intolerance but with a great deal of mutual amazement.

Lovecraft's poems were, by his own frank admission, merely literary exercises, mostly in that stilted, Georgian style which he admired so much; yet he wrote some excellent verse, and his sonnet entitled "Continuity", published in the first issue of Causerie, is one of the most impressive I have ever read. I think that his reputation will finally rest, not so much on his weird fiction, which was to some extent a tour de force, but on his collected essays, letters, and miscellany. Of his short stories, those dealing with the diablerie of haunted houses, witchcraft, and similar subjects are the most enthralling; in other realms "out of space, out of time," his objective method and rather naive terminology fell just a trifle short of producing the effect of nameless and menacing evil so implicit in the terrible evocations of Arthur Machen, Dunsany, and Poe. They are infinitely superior to the best horror stories of current magazines, but, as Pytheas said of the arguments of Demosthenes, they are slightly redolent of the lamp. Just before his death Lovecraft spoke to me of an ambitious project reserved for some period of greater leisure, a sort of dynastic chronicle in fictional form, dealing with the hereditary mysteries and destinies of an ancient New England family, tainted and cursed down the diminishing generations with some grewsome variant of lycanthropy. It was to be his magnum opus, embodying the results of his profound researches in the occult legends of that grim and secret country which he knew so well, but apparently the outline was just beginning to crystallize in his mind, and I doubt if he left even a rough draft of his plan.

Lovecraft's attitude toward his ailments was humourously stoical but his kindness and tenderness toward the misfortunes of others was a beautiful thing. We never met, our acquaintance being wholly through the exchange of letters, yet during an illness of over two years, when my responses were infrequent and probably ungracious (for I was anything but a cheerful invalid), he wrote me the most charming and cheerful letters, never less than once a week,—letters of twenty pages or more, brimful of sparkling gossip, literary causeries, amusing stories of his adventures, and the sort of tactful, unspoken sympathy that alone is enduring. He actually toured the South one winter, using bus lines, living in hotels, and subsisting on thirty cents per diem, making the whole experience sound like a glorious lark! I never told him that the anticipation of his inspiring weekly letters provided me with what sometimes seemed my only incentive to hang on, and now the bitter memory of the dereliction sticks in my craw.

There was really nothing affected in Lovecraft's eccentricities; they sprang quite spontaneously from the ferment of a powerful and original mind. His occasional profanity may have been an inheritance from robustious sea-faring ancestors, one of whom, he related with great glee, was a known pirate and smuggler. But usually he drew his expletives from a considerable weird nomenclature of his own invention, and his letters bristled with such ejaculations as "By Yuggoth!" or "Azolthoth, but I wish I were in Florida!" A chance word was suf-



ficient to start him off on eager speculations. On one occasion when I pretended to find some vulgar and comic associations in his use of the word "feto", he replied, "pausing for reflection, ... I think that if I have any tendency to associate the word 'feto' with any particular idea or scene or object, it is the charnel house or tomb. Not that I've ever seen a charnel house or smelled anything around a tomb, but that literary associations supply the images. My next concrete association, I think, would be with the odor of some hellish monster, or any sinister odor where it ought not to be—like the 'odor of goat' or some reptilian taint, detected (in the best weird fiction) when some sinister character of faunesque or vampirish or werwolfish nature passes by". And then he adds, "I'm very sensitive to bad odors, which put me out of business as about as effectively as anything short of cold weather." Recalling the disingenuous character of my outrageous insinuations in the light of these painstaking explanations, I laughed so hard I tore a few stitches, and the nurse threatened to confiscate all correspondence and tape me to the bed. In another letter, after I had suggested that a monograph should be written on the amusing apposition of sound to sense in certain terse but unprintable Anglo-Saxonisms, Lovecraft promptly assumed that I intended to undertake the task, and sent me an exhaustive glossary, with learned philological annotations and illuminating examples ranging from Petronius to the bawdy literature of the eighteenth century.

I think that the most lasting impression Lovecraft left me was one of essential nobility, of dauntless integrity. He was a great scholar in his ability to pluck the heart out of any subject. He was an enthusiastic antiquarian, a deadly controversialist, a writer of distinction, a correspondent of surpassing charm; in short, a man of such engaging parts and accomplishments as to win the esteem and affection of all who knew him. But deeply as I admired these attributes, he remains enshrined in my memory as a great gentleman, in the truest sense of that much abused term.



## A FEW MEMORIES

JAMES F MORTON

My personal sense of loss in the passing of Howard Lovecraft is still far too acute to permit me to gather my recollections of him and to write of them with any degree of calmness. Howard was a person absolutely unforgettable by any who came within range of his influence. I have never known any human being who approximated his totally unique characteristics. Great and lasting as were his services to amateur journalism, they formed but a tiny percentage of those activities which brought him into close contact with the most intimate circle of his friends. To this belonged primarily a group of his fellow writers of weird and exotic fiction, with a very small number of amateur journalists and still fewer outside both these ranks. With this intimate circle he kept in constant touch through correspondence and, where possible, through personal contact. Certain of his closest friends he had never even seen. This did not mean quite so much to him as it would to most of us, for correspondence was almost the breath of life to him. He said to me one day that, no matter how often he had met him on the most friendly terms, he never felt that he really knew him until he had corresponded for some time with him. Howard himself was most at home with pen in hand. I think of him as the last of the great classical letter-writers, and as almost singlehanded saving correspondence from being a lost art. He hated the typewriter and used it only to meet the demands of editors. He said that the interposition of a mechanical device impeded the flow of thought. Hence, in all his private correspondence he wrote unweariedly page after page in his well known fine script. His letters were lengthy almost beyond belief; and he loved to devote numberless pages to detailed accounts of the places which he visited, and still more to endless arguments on all conceivable subjects, in which he delighted beyond measure. A letter of thirty or more closely written pages was by no means an isolated phenomenon with him.

Howard liked to consider himself a man of the eighteenth century, in which, he maintained, the true race pattern of the Anglo-Saxon people had most effectively culminated. He was inordinately devoted to Georgian architecture, and held that it afforded the only correct model for the homes and public buildings of those who show the best taste. His utmost scorn was reserved for structures and interiors showing any trace of Victorian influence. He held firmly to the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and vocabulary of the eighteenth century, whenever and wherever it was possible to do so. He was probably the only twentieth century person in either England or America who actually talked, without the faintest effort or affectation, after the manner of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and following the same practices in his letters. There was no posing in this, which was to him an absolutely natural mode of expression. In his light moments, he delighted in playfully indulging himself in modern slang, and thus going to the opposite pole from his



normal method; and when he did so, he did it well and showed complete mastery of his linguistic material. But he knew no resting place between the two extremes. He tried valiantly, at least until a late period in his life, to uphold the artificial Pegasus verse as what the best poetry should be. But his own keen sense and powers of humor could not be denied. I remember that I once told him frankly that some of his extreme justification and admiration of the eighteenth century was palpably a pose. He laughed and answered: "But isn't it an artistic pose?" I could never overcome the feeling that his tongue was often in his cheek when he persisted in claiming that he regarded himself as still a loyal subject of the king of Great Britain and condemned the American Revolution as a great error or worse. He meant this in part, but only in part, as it formed an element in his general somewhat topheavy theory. But his solitary adhesion to the spirit of an age long since left behind in the evolution of our race only endeared him the more to his friends, though we argued with him ferociously and at immense length in our endless correspondence.

Howard always insisted on taking the attitude of an arch-materialist and declared that all conceptions of right and wrong were simply amusing delusions. Nevertheless, he was himself the most rigid Puritan on Earth, both theoretically and practically. His mode of maintaining his standards was to pronounce as inartistic and contrary to a gentleman's code the things of which he disapproved; but the result was all that could be demanded by the most strict ethicist.

Howard was always, above all else, the perfect gentleman. No matter how provoked, it seemed impossible for him to lose his temper. If bitterly angered, he showed the fact only by a growing coldness of demeanor and an exaggerated formal politeness. To strangers and casual acquaintances his manner was that of calm courtesy; to his friends, one of indescribable and gentle graciousness, rarely marked by anything approaching exuberance. He did not believe in enthusiasm, though sometimes a pastoral scene or an unusually fine example of a colonial doorway would elicit a strong outcry of admiration and delight. He declared that the only correct attitude toward life was that of a quiet and amused philosophical detachment, and that when life ceased to be amusing, it was time to retire from it.

But to write in any thorough way regarding one who was in many respects the most remarkable character I have ever known would require volumes. These little snatches of impressions garnered through years of close friendship may suffice for the present as indications of a very limited number of the more salient aspects under which Howard Lovecraft was seen and known by those who were nearest to him in sympathy and understanding.



EDWARD H COLE

AVE ATQUE VALE!

On March 18, 1937, at Swan Point Cemetery, Providence, Rhode Island, were laid to rest the mortal remains of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, one of the noblest and most inspiring spirits in the Society of Amateur Journalists. Only three of those who cherished him in life accompanied him to the grave; his beloved aunt, another more distant relative, and I, who could not bear that he should lack the final tribute of at least one fellow amateur journalist. It remains an abiding satisfaction of my life that I was present.

Ten days later I visited again the delightful Georgian home at 66 College Street that had brought to Howard a supreme happiness of environment in his last years. There is the large rectangular, high-ceilinged room which had been his study. I talked with young Robert Barlow, his literary executor, who had flown from Kansas City only too late to attend the funeral, and was remaining to fulfill the sad task of arranging for the disposal of Howard's estate. Barlow's was a most bewildering task. There were hundreds of books on nearly every topic and stacks of magazines to which Lovecraft had contributed or in which he had a peculiar interest. There were an extensive collection of amateur papers and accumulations of geological phenomena that Lovecraft had gathered in the course of his tireless ramblings. There were manuscripts without number on well nigh every conceivable theme and of every description—essays, stories, poetry, scientific discussions, tales of mystery,—but how can they be enumerated? We spoke long and lovingly of him who had been the Genius of this room. What an enigma! Talented as few men have been, he had been denied the active career his ambition urged. None the less, he had made truce with Fate and Fortune and had created for himself a world that gave him happiness, though he felt himself denied the full enjoyment of the world about him! Though his abilities might well have enabled him to loom large in that other world, he had been content to devote his best energies to that of his own making. It was a world that had much make-believe and many idiosyncracies. Those of us who knew him were always a bit amused by his pose as Theobald, as grandpa sitting by the window and watching the world go by, foregoing its rugged activities, but very knowing and forgiving with respect to its foibles and follies. We smiled at his convictions that civilization had reached its pinnacle in the eighteenth century, and we felt it to be an eccentricity that he should affect the literary style of the Georgian era and find reason for ecstasy only in colonial art and architecture and dress and manners and politics. Because those things were so genuine to him and because we loved him so, we humored his oddity, only to find ourselves half converted to his mood and his belief as we felt his enthusiasm and saw through his eyes.



Barlow and I asked one another the solution of the enigma. For Lovecraft had shown himself adept in the life and manners of our own day, too, once he permitted himself to participate fully in the world about him. Who could enter more heartily into the discussion of any contemporary problem or participate more effectively and wittily in any gathering? Yet he remained to the last content to appear the recluse, the passive observer of an active world from which he was withdrawn.

He was, nevertheless, the Presiding Genius in the world of his own creation, or, more accurately, in several little worlds. Amateur journalism was one. The small world of his few acquaintances in Providence was another. As a young man departed from the funeral, I overheard him say to his companion, "I didn't know Mr. Lovecraft well—I'd only met him a few weeks ago at his boarding house—but I recognized him as a most unusual man and shall always remember the few visits I made to his room." The world of writers of weird stories and mystery tales was a third. He has been acclaimed (probably too fulsomely) as the equal of Poe; the project is underweigh to publish his literary works in three considerable volumes. There were still other worlds of which I know too little to write.

Barlow, who knew him very intimately, and who lived with him daily during two summers, ventured the thought that Lovecraft's true talent lay in essay-writing. On one occasion he had expressed that idea to Howard himself. Lovecraft had partly agreed. "Why don't you publish your essays, then?" Whereupon Lovecraft had replied, "Because my best work is for my friends. What I do for pay is done because I must live, but it's hack work, and my heart's not in it. I put myself into what I do for my friends." If there is any finer expression of the amateur spirit, I have yet to hear it.

Lovecraft dissipated his energies upon his friends, but it was a most excusable and lovable dissipation. His friends were innumerable; he was constantly seeking out kindred spirits with whom he might correspond. There was hardly a limit to the number of such friends or to the multiplicity or to the length of the letters he could write. He is said to have been in active correspondence with at least a hundred persons, and during the last year of his life he undertook vigorous communications with fifteen new friends. Anyone so blessed as to receive his letters, moreover, can testify that he was the ideal correspondent. Replies were never delayed. The letters he wrote were marvels of wit, understanding, sympathy, encouragement, genuine solicitude for the well-being of the recipient, and a most lively and compelling narrative of the writer's recent activities. He put to shame the ordinary letter writer by the promptitude and the voluminousness of his own correspondence. Yet he always permitted the other fellow to set the tempo of the exchange. My own files reflect perfectly the years in which other affairs prevented me from active correspondence, likewise those occasional years in which my leisure permitted participation to the full. I never had a dull letter from him, and his post cards were sources of piquant delight. He filled every iota of blank space and often part of the picture with closely packed miniscular handwriting



with the archaic spellings to which he was given. I used to make him laugh by telling him I should find his cards a source of never-ending wonder, for every time I reread them I discovered a new meaning or deciphered another world. To the present day I am still mystified as to many quite blurred phrases. His communications were always a challenge to my ingenuity with script and never failed to serve as a stimulus to my frequently flagging spirits.

Barlow and I sat talking of these things. Lovecraft's aunt, Mrs. Phillips Gamwell, and my wife joined us. The late March sun sank rapidly in a flawless sky; twilight cast its deepening shadows; a star here and there gleamed in the grey-blue; then the lights in the buildings of downtown Providence began to shine forth, too. We sat in silence, spiritually stirred by the peace and the beauty of the sight which had exercised its mysterious spell over Lovecraft himself on many an evening and had caused him to write in terms of unrestrained joy and happiness of the content that filled his soul in this, his home. And as the light faded gently into night, and we scarcely could see one another's faces, Mrs. Gamwell expressed the thought that we all were suppressing: "It seems as though Howard himself were here." Perhaps he was. Probably his spirit was there, if there is anything in the thought that the souls of the departed return to commune with those who sorrow. Such an hour, such friends, such utter majesty and beauty of scene, such peace would have been to him inescapable.

In the years that have passed since those fateful days over three years ago, I have thought much and have pondered deeply about Howard Lovecraft. He is peculiarly in my mind because so many of the avenues of my life are haunted with intimate memories of him. For nearly twenty-five years was he intertwined with the events of my life, and occasionally was my companion as I went about my daily work. I have recollections of him from almost every scene of my customary activities.

In my own home, where he was always a most welcome guest, there's a rocking chair and there's Peter, the big part-angora. How Howard used to sit in that chair by the fireside and try to win the attention of the indifferent animal! He'd dangle his watch and chain to win a passing gleam and an outstretched paw as the chain swept by. Shall I ever forget the indescribably funny attempts Howard made to imitate the cat's inordinately loud purr?—attempts which sounded, I declared, somewhat between a stifled peanut-stand whistle and the unsuccessful effort of a soda-fountain to explode! Howard was a great lover of cats. He used to write me most entertainingly and imaginatively of the Council of toms that sunned themselves on the roof of a shed beneath his window at 66 College Street. Then there's the pathetic black kitten that used to accompany him occasionally from his boarding house to his study. One day, for no known reason, the poor little animal fell dead. Describing the incident to me, Lovecraft expressed his emotion in verses of touching pathos and fine feeling.

"My fortnight of solitude has been signalized by a distressing plethora of work, a picturesque siege of indigestion which had me in bed 2 days (I'm hardly out of it now),



and a sorrow of unfeigned poignancy... the passing of my little black friend across the garden, of whom I spoke so frequently last month, and whom I vainly tried to find when you were here. Poor little Sam Perkins! And he seemed to be getting along so well—even making his peace with the old Toms of the shed roof and becoming a member of the Kappa Alpha Tau! On the 7th he was here nearly all day—climbing over Grandpa, rustling the papers on the old gentleman's desk, and signing a letter to my aunt with a tiny foot-print. But on the tenth he was found lifeless—from no apparent cause—in the garden, and was interr'd amidst universal mourning... Blessed little piece of the night—he lived but from June to September, and was spared the knowledge of what savage winter is like! The Kappa Alpha Tau chaunt his requiem o' nights and I trust that Napoleon, His Grace, and Peter Ivanovitch may institute similar funorary observances.

The ancient garden seems tonight  
A deeper gloom to bear  
As if some silent shadow's blight  
Were hov'ring in the air

With hidden griefs the grasses sway  
Unable quite to word them—  
Remembering from yesterday  
The little paws that stirr'd them."

Of nights, I cannot sit in the quiet shades of my living room with Peter stretched out near by without thinking often of the many hours Howard and I have been there together in the course of the fourteen years during which he visited me in this house. Memories of the serious discussions, of banted and badinage, and of all those exchanges of thought and soul that endear friendship flood my mind and leave an ache in my heart that these hours are never to be renewed.

The historic sites of Quincy (of which Vollaston is a part)—the homes of the presidents, the church in which they repose, the Dorothy Q. house, Merrymount—all these, my daily environment, recall the spirited enthusiasm with which Howard visited them. Am I in Boston? There the drug store I pass daily on my way to work recalls the many occasions when it was the rendezvous for Howard and me when he came to Boston. I can call up instantly the picture of his tall figure, his long, almost cadaverous face, the inevitable black bag, and the peculiar case in which he carried his writing materials and a small telescope. How his somewhat somber features would light up with smiles, his eyes twinkle, and his hand reach forth in sincere greeting when I'd enter! There's Beacon Hill and Louisbourg Square, where Howard went into raptures over the perfect survival of eighteenth century architecture and through his enthusiasm made me keenly aware of the actual rarity and the true beauty of the scene. There's Bunker Hill and its monument, to which Howard always referred disparagingly as the scene where



the rebels overcame His Majesty's loyal troops.

It was an amusing part of Lovecraft's Game of Life that he loved to transport himself back to pre-Revolutionary days and feel that he was a loyal colonial, a Tory true to his King. He always made mock lamentation over the Separation. Indeed, he was so truly British in his sympathies, I understand, that in the early days of the World War, in 1914 or 1915, he actually enlisted under the British flag, and it required the most desperate efforts of his two aunts, armed with doctors' certificates of physical unfitness, to extricate him. So, at least, I was told shortly before I made his acquaintance at a meeting of the Providence Amateur Journalist's Club.

The narrator, a lively Irish-American named Dunn, who was active only for a few years, raised a high eyebrow about Lovecraft's physical unfitness, and for many years I, too, had my doubts, for Lovecraft appeared a very substantial citizen; and those who ever accompanied him on jaunts to visit places of historical interest had reason for days afterward to recall the occasion by virtue of aching limbs and paralyzed feet. He was truly indefatigable at such times. To this day I recall vividly the Saturday afternoon in July, 1923, when Lovecraft, Maurice Moe, Albert Sandusky, and I went to Old Marblehead to visit the numerous Colonial houses and other places of interest with which Howard was thoroughly familiar. He was so insistent that our friend from the west should not miss a single relic or point of view over lovely town or harbor that he walked us relentlessly for miles, impelled solely by his inexhaustible enthusiasm until our bodies rebelled, and, against his protests, we dragged ourselves to the train. Lovecraft was still buoyant. Howard's indifference to sleep and his apparent tirelessness at conventions and whenever amateur journalists assembled and lost no time in slumber, --all would give the lie to physical infirmity. That his ruggedness was only apparent is all too true. Just as he was graduated from Hope Street High School in Providence and was preparing to enter Brown, as he narrates in the letters published by Rheinhart Kleiner in the Californian, he was stricken with a malady that threatened to make an invalid of him for life. Ever afterward he was peculiarly susceptible to cold. As he told me on one occasion, temperatures of eighty to a hundred degrees gave him a feeling of fitness, but let the thermometer fall below sixty and he became, of necessity, a recluse, wrapped in blankets and hugging steam radiators. Not the least of his enthusiasm for 66 College Street was that, although it was a truly Georgian mansion, it had been very adequately equipped by Brown University with steam heat, most plentifully supplied from a central heating plant. His aunt has told me that in winter he would revel in an atmosphere of one hundred degrees with the radiators pounding and pipes clanking and winter's snows and gelid temperatures without for him to mock. He rarely ventured forth from December to March or April, other than to hurry across to the boarding house where he ate one meal daily (he prepared the others himself). He once laughed at the situation and confessed that he should live in Florida in winter, if not the year 'round. He would have been completely happy if only he could



have afforded residence in the south during the cold season and in Providence when the weather was mild or warm. His heart was bound, nevertheless, to his native city, and he would not have been content to dwell away from it. His "exile" to New York and Brooklyn for the few years of his married life was truly an unhappy episode; he returned to Providence profoundly determined to make it his permanent residence with but temporary excursions elsewhere.

Despite the infirmity that so circumscribed his life (though it did not cause his death) Howard possessed an intellectual vitality that amply compensated. I have never known a person so essentially a creature of mind. Beyond high school he was completely self-educated yet he had both a range and a depth of knowledge rare even among intellectuals. He had a veritable nose for research and pursued to the remotest ends whatever information he sought. His mind was quick to grasp. He quickly penetrated beneath the surface of facts and comprehended principles and truths. He assimilated rapidly, and he retained ready hold of an astounding amount of detail. His memory was crowded with the minutiae of whatever he had studied or experienced. For years he had studied astronomy, made frequent use of an observatory near his home, and wrote a column for a Providence newspaper. He ranged the hills, the fields, and the shores of Rhode Island to gather geological and biological specimens, many of which he assembled in his room. He read extensively in a tremendous variety of fields; his personal library was truly vast and contained not only the ponderous tomes of learned writers but also fiction of ephemeral nature. His knowledge of authors was surprising; a book, to him, was something to be assimilated, or, at least, perused. He delved into detective stories; his researches into mystery tales and morbid literature as a background for his own writing made him a master of a type in the production of which he attained distinction.

In argument he was devastating, as I learned shortly after I became acquainted with him. I had chanced the remark that the Roman occupation of Britain had left little traces in the language of the natives; that the Latin influence dated from the later missionary sources and from the Norman Conquest. Shortly afterward he wrote me a bulky letter assembling unassailable authority from an overwhelming variety of sources that demolished my arguments. I never forgot the episode, and later I often had occasion to marvel at his limitless capacity for assembling information and his masterfulness in hurling it at anyone who ventured to enter into debate.

The driving force of his mind, too, gave to his otherwise somewhat somber countenance an animation, a positive luminousness, when he was launched upon a subject in which he was truly interested. His manner became thoroughly vitalized; his voice grew vibrant; his words poured forth in a nervous, high-pitched torrent so turbulent that often he almost stuttered because his tongue could not keep pace with his swift thought.

His capacity for retaining fact extended to the smallest matters of life. Once when we were driving from Leominster to Fitchburg he recalled the exact hour on which horsecars were withdrawn from the line.



His last letter to me contains exact references to incidents in our relations years previous. He often entered into conversation with Mrs. Cole about the ingredients of delightful recipes he had run across from time to time.

His most intense exaltation and contagious enthusiasm, however, was for Georgian architecture and for relics of the eighteenth century. On those matters he became an authority and could speak hours on end about the variants of architectural devices and the shifting styles of dress of the period, to say nothing of the inexhaustible subjects of utensils, manners, literature,—in short, everything. To run down a Georgian house he had not previously seen was the joy of his life. He saved penuriously to make trips to Marblehead and Salem and Portsmouth and in his later years to the Carolinas to revel in the mansions of the eighteenth century. He wrote of them glamorously; he dragged me, not unwilling, whenever we were in the vicinity. I have fond memories of Salem and Marblehead as revealed through his eyes. Once we drove to Lexington and Concord and finally to West Townsend, where we ate lunch in a truly eighteenth century tavern; his curiosity, his enthusiasm, his admiration, his appreciation were revelations of a thirsty soul that would drink in everything. A few years ago he discovered the Gilbert Stuart birthplace "in the South country," the Providence Plantations area of Rhode Island. His pleasure was unbounded when Mrs. Cole and I joined him in a journey to behold its loveliness. The house was only early on its way to restoration, but he made us see what it must have been in its prime, and we became as enthusiastic as he about the beauty of its setting—a small clearing surrounded by ancient trees, a brook running near by and utilized to operate the grist mill. In his last letter he glowed over still another house he had visited: "the ancient Clemance house (1654), now recognized as the oldest edifice in Rhode Island...its builder—Thomas Clemance, a friend of Roger Williams—is a lineal ancestor of mine in the 8th generation." And he drew a very recognizable illustration to make clear its architectural peculiarities.

With Lovecraft's passing there went from the lives of those who shared his friendship an influence irreplaceable. Howard was unique and anachronistic. He brought into this age of hurry and unrest the manners of an age of leisure and the outlook of a polished gentleman of intellectual attainments. To his world he admitted a few who found therein new appreciations and a respite from the tedium of their own lives and, above all, an enthusiastic docent to reveal surprising pleasures to their eyes. He gave them a friendship of rich and rare quality. He gave them, too, the inspiration of a noble soul that had struggled through deep disappointment and despair to the contentment and happiness of a world of his own making.

Today those who, as I have done, went their way through the peaceful paths of Swan Point Cemetery to the Phillips lot will find upon the



granite shaft the final record:

WINFIELD S. LOVECRAFT 1853-1898

His Wife

SARAH S. PHILLIPS 1857-1921

Their Son

HOWARD P. LOVECRAFT 1890-1937

But those who knew him will turn from that simple inscription, as I have done, with a heaviness of heart and a longing of soul that find alleviation only in the wealth of precious and happy memories, his generous bequest to those who shared his love.



# THE CTHULHU MYTHOS: A STUDY

GEORGE WETZEL

## GENERAL

When the body of Lovecraft's prose is studied, it is at once seen that there is a varied and elaborated repetition of certain concepts and supernatural actors to which the phrase "The Cthulhu Mythos" has justifiably been given. The underlying theme in his work, aside from whatever plot is immediately manifested on the surface of individual poems and stories, is the struggle of supernormal entities to regain their mastery over the world and man from which they once were ousted. The more one studies the Mythos stories of HPL, the more convinced he will become as to their close unity despite their separate fictional frameworks; which brings me to conclude that the Mythos stories should actually be considered not as separate works but rather the different chapters of a very lengthy novel. When viewed this way, many series of stories using the theme of, say, the "ghoul-changeling" seem logical as they reveal in separate story-chapters the slow disclosure of some particular evil or horror. The gateway between the waking world and Hell/dreamworld of the Mythos was one such theme that was not immediately revealed in THE STATEMENT OF RANDOLPH CARTER, or in THE TEMPLE, but only finally in THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH; and similarly the nature and powers of Nyarlathotep which HPL never finished, though he came close to completion in THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK. There are other half finished concepts and still unsolved mysteries in the Mythos which only study will disclose, and some that no amount of study will ever unravel; as HPL's clues (successive stories with their gradually unfolding of particular mysteries—as witness the "ghoul-changeling" theme—though this latter he did give the final revelation in PICKMAN'S MODEL) are not existent, as he died leaving some such unwritten in additional fiction.

As to why Lovecraft created his Mythos—his lengthy novel called THE CTHULHU MYTHOS, if I be permitted—evidence exists in many of his little known philosophical articles written in amateur journals, and in some of his stories and poetry. Like CELEPHAIS, he wrote: "Whilst they strove to strip from life its embroidered robes of myth and to show in naked ugliness the foul thing that is reality, Kuranos sought for beauty alone." And again in THE MATERIALIST TODAY, he remarked: "There is no object or purpose in ultimate creation, since all is a ceaseless repetitive cycle of transitions from nothing back to nothing again... All is illusion, hollowness and nothingness—but what does that matter? Illusions are all we have, so let us pretend to cling to them..." Then there is some development of this recurrent philosophy in the curious poem TO AN INFANT (printed in "The Brooklynite," Oct., 1925), or which the following lines give some idea:



"For dreams, as they are most precious,  
are most fragile of all we prize,  
And the pow'rs of earth that enmesh  
would sear them out of our eyes...  
... They are all that we have to save us  
from the sport of the Ruthless Ones,  
These dreams that the cosmos gave us  
in the void past the farthest sun..."

I could go on with other quotes, like passages from HPL's article, LIFE FOR HUMANITY'S SAKE, which prove his reason for creating the world of the Cthulhu Mythos.

Other facts about his Mythos are not too well known, especially the fact that Greek mythic ideas were formative influences in his Mythos, despite the known fact that the Dunsany stories gave him the initial push towards creation of his own Mythos. From 1917 to 1923 his poetry is full of Greco allusions and outright rhymed Greek mythic narratives. The Grecian influence in his prose is less obvious, though a quick check shows such unquestionable bits as in THE MOON BOG, THE TREE, HYPNOS, etc. Origination of such things as the Greek titled NECRONOMICON, the similarity of the Mythos Hell/dreamworld to the Greek Hades, etc., again prove the contention. And in his story POETRY AND THE GODS, which is of Greek gods, one sees in Hermes the messenger, the Messenger of Azathoth, named Nyarlathotep; in the dream communication of the Greek gods with mortals the same psychic device used later by Cthulhu to contact his cult followers. In the article, A DESCENT TO AVERNUS, HPL likens the cavernous earth, blighted by things suggestive of horrors in the Mythos, to the Greek Tartarus. His three poems in A CYCLE OF VERSE likewise have a glimmering of the Mythos' horrors but with the Grecian taint.

Numerous other interesting facets emerge from the Mythos which a book would truly need be written to show. Suffice to remark on HPL's use of the terminal climax, a device used repeatedly by E. L. White... which gives to the work of both that identical quality of a nightmarish dream which likewise ends on a note of final and terrible revelation. Then HPL used in a number of stories a remarkable single feverish crescendo that builds from the start to the ending, increasing, without any single lessening of its fervor but instead a brilliant upsurge of fear.

Lovecraft has been called an amoralist, but in his THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH is discernible the one instance of an effect and poetic moralistic ending. Since this novel was not long after his unfortunate New York sojourn, the conclusion that the moralistic ending and perhaps the rest of the novel as well is but a fragment of a spiritual autobiography is well founded.

### THE NECRONOMICON

Creation of the Necronomicon was one of HPL's most interesting ideas, and there is some basis for thinking he received some of the inspiration from awareness of the similarly arcane Book of Thoth that occurs in Egyptian mythology. That he meant the Necronomicon to have some antecedents in Egyptian arcana can be shown.



I originally had roughly translated the Greek meaning of the Necronomicon as "Book of the Names of the Dead." But Donald Susan pointed out that "nom; nomos" was more correctly "Region;" and he interpreted the name to mean "Guide (or Book) to the Regions of the Dead," which does fit more logically with what character HPL meant it to have in the early stories.

Lovecraft, in his "History of the Necronomicon" (1936), states that Alhazred, author of the Book, visited, among other places, "the subterranean secrets of Memphis" (Egypt). In the story, THE GREEN MEADOW (1927), he tells of an ancient Greek who had translated some awful knowledge out of an Egyptian book, "...which was in turn taken from a papyrus of ancient Meroe (Egypt)." The well of forbidden knowledge, then, seems to have been in Egypt (within the framework of the Mythos), and Alhazred merely wrote of what he found there in the Necronomicon.

In THE STATEMENT OF RANDOLPH CARTER (1919), there appeared an old and nameless book which undoubtedly was the first mention in the Mythos of the Necronomicon. The fact that Harley Warren in the story used that book on his quest beneath a graveyard would indicate that it was a guide to where access could be found to the gateways between the waking world and the Hell/dreamworld of the Mythos. What he encountered below were the ghouls who, according to the lines in the poem NEMISIS, guard such places or else lurk there.

Later stories such as THE DUNWICH HORROR have the usage of the Necronomicon more as a source text of evil spells. The phenomena of growth that is found in other concepts and characters in the Mythos is evident in the gradual characterization of the Necronomicon.

As to where and how Lovecraft first thought of the name, not the idea, or the Necronomicon, I can theorize from a datum found in his serialized article, MYSTERIES OF THE HEAVENS, in the "Asherville Gazette-News" for April 3, 1915:- "...Manilius, referring to the Milky Way in his 'Astronomicon!...' An erudite writer like Lovecraft, with some knowledge of Greek, well knew the translation of "Astronomicon;" and when later on, casting about for a suggestive name for the evil book he first had described in part in THE STATEMENT OF RANDOLPH CARTER, he hit upon the association of ideas of Astronmicon, necro (meaning dead), and the fact that a character in THE STATEMENT OF RANDOLPH CARTER had used such a book to investigate the dark mysteries beneath a graveyard, the Necronomicon had evolved.

### NYARLATHOTEP

The first appearance of Nyarlathotep was a prose-poem of the same name in "United Amateur" in (Nov.) 1920; and a number of clues to some understanding of him—as meant by HPL---lurk in that work. The name of this god of the Mythos, if broken into "Nyarlath" and "hotep" have some significance at once. "Hotep," a suffix phrase, is Egyptian, and means "is satisfied." Lovecraft used it because it was a recurring suffix part of Egyptian names, and thus was a "color" to suggest anything Egyptian.

"Nyarlath," if broken down to just the phoneme "nya," is a prefix found in the names of gods of certain African negroid tribes. One such example is the "nyankopon," sky-god of the Ashanti.

Lovecraft spoke of Nyarlathotep as having arisen out of the darkness



of 27 centuries. This would place this god as having something to do with the 25th Dynasty—the Ethiopian invasion of Egypt. Nyarlathotep must then have been incarnate in some Ethiopian ruler of Egypt—must have been the driving power behind the Ethiopian armies that suddenly rose up and made their conquest.

But Lovecraft makes it plain that Nyarlathotep was not a negro, but a swarthy person, when he appeared in later stories. In fact, he seems to have been, in the Mythos, the embodied symbol not only of chaos and the final destruction of the world but also of darkness, as the black entity in the later HAUNTER OF THE DARK (1935); likewise, the black man of the witch covens in THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE (1932).

Another characteristic of Nyarlathotep was his power of demonic possession (the avatar concept used by HPL) and his hinted shape-changing. In the prose poem of 1920 it was said that he was the soul of the ultimate gods who were mindless gargoyles; which would indicate his shape-changing ability. Something of this seems likely in the black bat-like thing from the steeple in HAUNTER OF THE DARK; and in this same story he attempts demonic possession of the narrator.

THE CRAWLING CHAOS (July?, 1920) does not mention Nyarlathotep, but the story obviously has some connection with him, as HPL refers to him in THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH (1926) as the "crawling chaos;" and THE CRAWLING CHAOS was about the final end of the world, and probably the twilight of the Mythos' gods as well. In the fungi sonnet NYARLATHOTEP (1929-30), this Ragnarok ends with, "the idiot Chaos blew earth's dust away..." when Chaos destroyed, crushed, what "he chanced to mould in play." As Chaos seems to have the sense of a deity, here, he must be the creator god of the Mythos, as well as its destroyer. And since Nyarlathotep has the appellation of the "crawling chaos," he must be the creator god; this conclusion is bolstered in part by the fact that he has some close connection with the god Azathoth, who reposes at the center of Ultimate Chaos.

The god Azathoth in the Mythos was never quite developed (though if the fragmentary story AZATHOTH were ever completed, more might be known as to what his eventual characterization was) but in the prose existing, he does seem to have some connection with Nyarlathotep. The term AZOTH (compare the spelling to the god AZATHOTH) was a term in Medieval alchemy meaning "the primogenetic source-essence of life." Collate the similar spellings of the Mythos god and the alchemic term. The god existed at the center of chaos which in the Mythos seems to have been the center of the universe and life; then consider that chaos was a god in the sonnet NYARLATHOTEP, and consider the epithet given Nyarlathotep as "the crawling chaos." What is seen is a part of the Mythos still not quite formed but in the slow process of gestation.

### THE HELL OF THE MYTHOS

It is in the novel, THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH (1926), that the Hell of HPL's Cthulhu Mythos is fully described and made the locale of a story. Though HPL does not identify this sinister land of dream as the Mythos' Hell, it is so nevertheless and can be shown to be so upon study. The most outstanding proof of this is the similarity to the two-fold Hell of the Greek Mythology.

In the DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH, HPL wrote of King Kwiones that



he "...could not go back to these things in the waking world because his body was dead." King Kwiones was then the soul of a man, dead in the outside world; making the locale of DREAM QUEST the otherworld of the dead, Heaven, the Elysium of the Greeks.

But this pastoral aspect or Elysium of the Mythos' otherworld had contiguous regions that corresponded to the Tartarus of the Greeks, wherein a number of fearful entities might be encountered—like the domain of the Gugs or the mountain peak of Inquanok, where Carter meets the Shantak-birds.

Curiously enough, the Hell of the Mythos was also the dream - world wherein a slumberer's psyche existed during sleep. Carter's own perception of the Mythos' Hell was because he entered it in sleep. As sleepers have both pastoral and nightmarish dreams, HPL was able to make his conception of this dream-world coincide with the likewise twin concept of the otherworld of the dead.

When boiled down, HPL's Mythos' Hell was a commingled otherworld of the dead and the world of dream.

The dream-world part of this Hell concept was further developed in another way; those adventures therein, that the dreamer Carter had, like his meetings with the Night Gaunts, were not the peaceful visions of dream, but its dark side, its nightmares. There is a possible suggestion in the DREAM QUEST of such dark entities of this Hell's dream-world aspect, such nightmares gaining access to the waking world (a contemplated story by HPL at one time?), and creating havoc. By such horrors running amuck in the waking world, certain hideous demons and human monsters and ghouls in the Mythos would be explained.

In the dream novel there were several places where the waking world was touched upon by some of the sinisterra of the Mythos' Hell, places where these embodied nightmares could enter the waking world, giving rise to tales among men of demons, and possibly also explaining why gargoyles atop cathedrals bore resemblance to the ghouls of this place. Where these entrances touched the waking world from the wood of the Zoogs, there shone the phosphorescence of fungi; there was a phosphorescent shining abyss in the story, THE NAMELESS CITY (1921), and in the drowned temple in the story, THE TEMPLE (1920).

There were more fearsome gates to this Hell—through the burrows of the ghouls beneath graveyards, as revealed finally in the dream novel; when Carter visits the ghouls he notes that he is very near the waking world which the appearance of gravestones and funeral urns strewn about indicates all too clearly. The line, "Through the ghoul guarded gateways of slumber," from the early poem NEMISIS (1918), which prefigured some of this, takes on a disturbing meaning.

Harley Warren, in THE STATEMENT OF RANDOLPH CARTER, obviously came to his doom at the hands of such ghouls when exploring burrows under a graveyard.

In this concept of entering the Mythos' Hell not only in dream or even at certain earthly abysses, but also under a graveyard or, more specifically, through a grave, HPL's awareness of Greek beliefs again was used for inventive purposes. "Grave" was sometimes used in the New Testament as a synonym for "hell:" and entrance to hell (the Elysium and the Tartarus) was through a grave. Lovecraft utilized this idea in brilliant fashion in his Mythos' Hell concept.



## THE GHOUL-CHANGELING

In Lovecraft's hands, many supernatural concepts that were handled by other writers in orthodox fashion, and close to their traditional outlines, became transmuted into something original and refreshingly new. Like the manner in which he elaborated and developed the ghost theme, into something not like its traditional presentation, like the manner in which he treated the avatar theme with similarly original presentations, so he did with the ghoulish theme, changing some of it from its appearance in racial lore. With it, he embodied the changeling concept, a totally different ethnic belief (the changeling idea being Celtic; the ghoulish theme, Persian), so that a new supernatural actor or character was invented. By such inventions he gave not only to his own prose a freshness, but also bequeathed to supernatural fiction—a already threadworn with overly familiar supernatural actors—a new lease on life, a new source of plot and character material. This, along with his fusing of science-fictional concepts to the supernatural, is what makes his work so interesting.

Who has not puzzled over the identity of the narrator in Lovecraft's *OUTSIDER*? Even his *RATS IN THE WALLS* has several unanswered questions posed within its fictional framework. The mystery produced in these two and other tales is found only by their careful study in conjunction with the blue furnished by a later title, *PICKMAN'S MODEL*.

To my mind, the start of this mystery was the earlier *PICTURE IN THE HOUSE* (1920). Here, an ancient countryman possessed a book containing pictures of a hideous butcher shop of the Anzique cannibals, and he himself was cursed with a cannibalistic craving.

Then in 1921 we have the nebulous and Poesque horror of *THE OUTSIDER*. Many explanations as to the nature of the narrator have been put forth by readers of this tale, though it is significant that Lovecraft very obviously refrained from any. Even the climactic discovery of the narrator that a monstrous creature which appals him is his own mirrored reflection does not completely reveal his nature. Beyond the fact that he has existed in a subterranean place below a graveyard, all is vague.

The horrendous *RATS IN THE WALLS* (1923) was next to appear. Herein the motifs in the above two tales reiterate and are further developed. In the grotto beneath Exham Priory a ghastly butcher shop is found. There are cases of fratricide in the family history of the de la Poers, the owners of the place, for the implied reason that the secret of their character, or their true nature, has occasionally been revealed. But most significant is the fact that the passage between the priory cellar and the dreadful grotto was chiselled upward through the foundation rock.

All these evil adumbrations reach a peak in *PICKMAN'S MODEL* (1926). The protagonist of this story is degenerating, and a ghoulish trend is strongly hinted. Richard Pickman speaks authoritatively of ghouls who kidnap human children, leaving their own daemon offspring in their stead. Old graveyards, he says, are frequently inhabited by ghoulish things that burrow through the earth.



Piecing these clues together gives us a single common theme. The decadent countryman of *THE PICTURE IN THE HOUSE* now assumes the character of a ghoulish-changeling. The tomb-dweller in *THE OUTSIDER* is a kidnapped human who has dim memories of some teacher similar to the ghoulish mentors painted by Pickman in his picture, "The Lesson." The fratricides in *THE RATS IN THE WALLS* were perhaps necessitated by discovery that family members were ghoulish-changeling; certainly the evidence of the subterranean passageway bespeaks close connection of some sort between human beings and underground creatures.

Where Lovecraft got the central idea of his story *THE OUTSIDER* was apparently a passage in Hawthorne's *THE JOURNAL OF A SOLITARY MAN*, from which the following is quoted to show this:

"I dreamed one bright forenoon I was walking through Broadway, and seeking to cheer myself with warm and busy life of that far famed promenade... I found myself in this animated scene, with a dim and misty idea that it was not my proper place, or that I had ventured into the crowd with some singularity of dress or aspect which made me ridiculous... Every face grew pale; the laugh was hushed... and the passengers on all sides fled as from an embodied pestilence... I passed not one step farther, but threw my eyes on a looking-glass which stood deep within the nearest shop. At first glimpse of my own figure I awoke, with a horrible sensation of self-terror and self-loathing... I had been promenading Broadway in my shroud!"

In his *Commonplace Book*, Lovecraft recorded the germ idea of *THE OUTSIDER*, and placed after "Identity" a question mark; even though he may have had only a subconscious idea of the human identity of this character, the source of the story seems evident. The leaving of loose threads in a story (which he eventually tied together in a later story) is akin to Edward Lucas White's style where this latter author gave a true nightmarish quality to his prose by such vague but still partially outlined horrors at his terminal climaxes.

There are other ideas HPL derived from Hawthorne, some especially dealing with the ghoulish theme. For example, HPL jotted in his notebook the following suggested from Hawthorne's *DOCTOR GRIMSHAW'S SECRET*:

"Man lives near grave-yard—how does he live? Eats no food."

If one excepts my belief that Lovecraft meant to rationalize supernatural manifestations and biological anomalies as the embodied nightmares that crossed gateways to the waking world from the Mythos Hell-otherworld of dream, then the following in his notebook and verbatim from Hawthorne, would then suggest the start of a story unfinished by HPL.

"...a defunct nightmare, which had perished in the midst of its wickedness, and left its flabby corpse on the breast of the tormented one, to be gotten rid of as it might."

HPL would then rationalize the appearance in art of hideous figures as memories of such embodied nightmares. In fact, he leaves a strong clue to this when in *THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH* he significantly describes a ghoulish... "a curious face peering over it as a gargoyle



peers over a parapet of Notre Dame." Another bit of proof exists in PICKMAN'S MODEL wherein the faces painted by Pickman (ghouls) were compared for sheer hellishness to the gargoyles on Notre Dame cathedral.

The gargoyle idea itself figured in several notes in the commonplace Book, which notes came unmistakably from chapter XIV and XV in George MacDonald's PHANTASTES.

Though Lovecraft peopled the ancient tunnels in Boston's Old North End with fictitious ghouls in PICKMAN'S MODEL, such tunnels themselves actually exist, revealing HPL's erudition and use of local color. And in THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH he very facetiously remarks on ancient tombstones stolen (apparently by the ghouls) from several Boston and Salem graveyards; surprisingly enough, such pilfering took place in Boston by its citizens who used such stones for door stoops, chimney tops, etc., another example of HPL's occasional use of factual local color, and I might add, one of the few rare instances of his wry humor.

### GHOSTS AND AVATARS

The psychic possession theme and the ghost theme, in a Lovecraft story, are altogether different than their more orthodox presentation in the work of other authors. In the Mythos, both these themes are at times interwoven so that there emerges a concept particularly Lovecraftian. Thus the reason for considering both under one section. For purposes of simplification I allude to the psychic possession theme as the avatar theme in the Mythos.

Lovecraft embodied both the avatar and the ghost theme in THE TOMB (1917), wherein a restless spirit seeks consecrated burial and thereby peace by possession of a man's mind and body. It is very likely that this story was suggested to Lovecraft by de la Mare's novel, THE RETURN, which is somewhat similar in part. In the Lovecraft story, the memories and personality of the dead man are infused into the living body of the narrator and shares with him a common soul—this later delineation appears in later stories of the Mythos; there is also mention of the wandering of the narrator's dream-soul, another significant point in other later stories.

In THE TREE (1920), the metempsychosis of a dead artist's personality into an olive tree occurs. HERBERT WEST: REANIMATOR (1921-1922) deals with reanimated dead—as the story IN THE VAULT—but by scientific resurrection, and is reminiscent of the putrescent horror of Poe's THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR.

THE HOUND (1922) is a story where the ghost concept borders on the classification of a demon entity. An amulet is stolen by two diabolists from the grave of one who had been a ghoul in life. The amulet was carved with a picture of a winged hound, the lineaments of which were "drawn from obscure supernatural manifestations of the souls" of of ghouls. This idea that the souls of the dead have terrifying shapes Lovecraft elaborated upon in the later story, THE UNNATURAL. In the present story, the winged hound is the visual shape of the dead ghoul, which shape kills one of the diabolists and recovers its amulet. When the survivor opens the grave of the ghoul, there comes from the jaws of the ghoul's corpse "a deep, sardonic bay as of some gigantic hound,"



and corpse is again wearing its amulet.

THE UNNAMABLE (1923) portrays in fuller detail Lovecraft's idea that the psychic emanation (ghost) of a dead man is a grotesque distortion; and since in this story the corpse was extremely hideous in life, being half human and half animal, this rendered its ghost so much more grotesque that it could be described by a character in the story as "unnamable." The ghost of such a biological anomaly once living is what attacks the two men in this story.

THE SHUNNED HOUSE (1924) is a fuller elaboration of the Lovecraftian ghost concept. The shunned house was built over a graveyard where a vampire had been buried. (In the prior story, THE UNNAMABLE, Lovecraft had remarked of "old graveyards that teem with the terrible, unbodied intelligence of generations.") Some of the source material of this story can be very definitely traced. In an unpublished ms. Lovecraft sent to Wilfred Talman, titled WHO ATE ROGER WILLIAMS (date of writing unknown) there is much of this story's plot. Somewhat more of the same is to be found in THE GREEN PICTURE, contained in Charles Skinner's MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF OUR LAND, Vol. 1, p. 76; in fact, much of the same general description in the Skinner opus appears in the Lovecraft work as a collation will prove. It is interesting to note that fungus actually will grow atop the ground where a burial exists. Lovecraft also embodied another source, verbatim, of the vampire Roulet from the account given by John Fiske in his book, MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKERS. In this Lovecraft story the ghost of the dead vampire hovers about as a luminous vapor (the special Lovecraft idea of a grotesque ghost is not prominent here) and invades the minds and bodies of its victims. They share its memories and also the same common soul. Much more could be said in analysis of this one story's other part, but space is lacking.

IN THE VAULT (1925) is the closest Lovecraft ever came to the usual form of ghost story and significantly enough when it was printed in "Tryout," Nov., 1925, Lovecraft prefaced it thusly: "Dedicated to C. W. Smith from whose suggestion the central situation is taken."

Ghosts appeared in other Lovecraft stories such as THE EVIL CLERGYMAN, THE FESTIVAL, and HE (this last was of dead Indians). One of the curiosities in the Mythos stories was the ghost of King Kurnaes, in THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH, whose body lay dead in the waking world but whose ghost frequented the dream/underworld world of the Mythos.

The avatar concept has been shown to be interwoven with the ghost concept in the Mythos but Lovecraft wrote other stories in which other than a ghost possessed a living person. These other stories were of humans with strange magical powers who performed possession or even mind exchange, or of outre life forms who did the same, or even the gods, the most notable being Nyarlathotep.

In THE FESTIVAL (1923) he makes quite obvious what it is that shares a common soul—"the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from this charnel clay, but fests and instructs the very worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs..."

The thing in THE COLOUR OUT OF SPACE (1927) absorbs all in fungoid blighted area into its own substance, even humans and their minds—



again the common soul idea. In the CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD (1926-7), the invading entity completely ousts the original soul; whereas in THE SHADOW OUT OF TIME and THE CHALLENGE FROM BEYOND, there is mind exchange, as in THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP. BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP is of an alien mind existing simultaneously in the mind of an earth man.

The most interesting, however, is THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK (1935), where the sentient blackness from the steeple was an avatar of Nyarlathotep that briefly demonically possessed the mind and body of Robert Blake, the main character. As this will require proof, I will detail the same:

In this story, Nyarlathotep is mentioned as "in antique and shadowy Khem taking the form of man," which indicates that god's power of psychic possession; also in the passage the above quote comes from (at the story's end) it is apparent the thing from the steeple is being referred to. In the same passage occurs this "Roderick Usher—am mad or going mad—I am it and it is I." This points out the common soul and possession of Blake's mind. The reference to Roderick Usher seems unrelated until Lovecraft's remarks on Poe's THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER is recalled; which are: "Usher... displays an abnormally linked trinity of entities at the end of a long and isolated family history—a brother, his twin sister, and their incredibly ancient house all sharing a single soul and meeting one common dissolution at the same moment."

When the lightning strikes the black thing, the fatal bolt is transferred to Blake, since he shares a common soul with it, and he is killed. The aspect of blackness is peculiar to Nyarlathotep; in this story it is evident, and it occurs in the prose-poem NYARLATHOTEP and similarly in the black man in THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE. Since black was a symbol of evil in ethnic tales, HPL obviously meant this god to be the physical embodiment of evil.



MATTHEW H. UNDERHILL

A Discussion of the Supreme Contribution  
of Howard Phillips Lovecraft to the  
Philosophy of the Weird Tale.

## THE LORD OF R'LYEH

To the uninitiated, it may appear a curious fact that the most avid readers of supernatural literature usually have no belief in the reality of the categories of human experience therein described. They peruse it for the unique and untold enjoyment obtained: fundamentally it is a medium for entertainment. A few of the best works in the genre may cause a deepening of the spiritual insight, but generally the net result never directly affects their actions or the daily decisions they must make in carrying out the tedium of existence.

It seems equally true that among the host of writers in this field a substantial majority admit to an agnostic attitude towards the verity of these same convictions. These authors are, almost without exception, very sensitive and extremely learned in the lore of the unseen, but they have likewise a strong distaste for the naive and credulous outlook which would accept these credos as the revealed truth.

If we care to seek an explanation for this sometimes perplexing state of affairs, the most likely conclusion that appears would seem to be that those really steeped in the occult, and to whom the nearness of the other world is a matter-of-fact daily occurrence, are entirely too close to the whole matter to gain a proper perspective. To these, the supernatural is too real to be a satisfactory medium for literary expression. Stories in this domain must of necessity appear insipid and puerile to them; hence, such believers usually have no true critical appreciation of the art.

After all, if you are actually convinced you can communicate with the deceased via spiritualism, or if you really believe you are able to invoke demons or gods and propitiate them if necessary—all by the use of proper spells and incantations—it is small wonder that a barley-water version of the real thing provokes only amusement or boredom.

We reach, finally, the rather intriguing paradox that, in the main, the great majority of spectral stories are written by unbelievers for the delectation of other unbelievers—equally fervid in their heretical views. The fundamental problem of why some people since the dawn of time have been obsessed with the unknown and the unseen, and why so many have had such a passionate interest in reciting and listening to spectral ballads and later in history in reading and writing about the supernatural, is a tremendous and profound question. However, since it is clearly beyond the scope of the present article, we regretfully abandon it and concentrate attention directly on the chosen subject matter.



Howard Phillips Lovecraft was a rationalist. There can be little doubt of this, not only from consideration of his own published works but from the casual testimony of friends and acquaintances. In view of what has been said above, that alone should provide no barrier to our understanding of why he could also be a writer of fine supernatural tales. When we dig deeper, however, and note that he asserted he was a mechanistic materialist in philosophy, we may again wonder a little. For this same man, not content with works of more conventional form, such as the superb short story "The Outsider," and the magnificent novel "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," progressed further and created in literary form a new family of Gods and associated lore which we have come now to know under the general title 'The Cthulhu Mythos.'

Here would seem to be a basic contradiction. If "mechanistic materialism" means what it implies, it would indicate a conviction that man's psychical faculties as well as his physical ones — and all the attributes of his world and the universe around him — are uniformly governed by immutable and inviolable mechanical laws, some of which we have already discovered and labelled "science." In short, man and the universe are equally machines; and machines have no power of choice: they must obey the laws which regulate their actions. To such an adherent, it would require an impossible wrench of the intellect to postulate powers of any sort which could modify, reverse, or set aside these blind mechanical laws or any part of them merely to satisfy some whim of the gods or supplication of mankind.

Now, the most immediate conclusion which might be drawn in the case of Lovecraft is that his literary creation of a new pantheon was simply a grim, ironic jest; a bold nose-thumbing at conventional religious concepts; a credo that any man may construct his own family of gods to suit his own tastes and inclinations; a dictum that each man's pantheon has equal validity because in reality none of them has any intrinsic meaning. Those who know anything of Lovecraft the man, however, and who are aware of his genuine erudition, must cast aside immediately such ideas. A man of his character, learning, and intellectual integrity was utterly incapable of such shallow posturing, such sophomoric sniping at fundamental and human questions.

Here was Lovecraft's dilemma as this writer sees it, and here is how he resolved it, according to the best thought and meditations of this same humble seeker after truth: Lovecraft had an innate predilection for the weird and the supernatural since early childhood. Next, he professed an intense nostalgia for the vanished eighteenth century and all it implied (and surely the eighteenth century was a veritable apotheosis of mechanistic materialism in science and philosophy!). Finally, he had a complete awareness of twentieth century science and the speculation arising therefrom: he well knew the terrifying new vistas it had opened to the human mind. So the query is: how to reconcile these diverse elements?

In the fires of genius flaming in his brilliant intellect he was able to reinterpret eighteenth century mechanism in the light of twentieth century relativity and indeterminacy, and then to integrate these new basic concepts of science with the best elements surviving from age-old supernaturalism. The crowning touch was the added glamour of the weird, which like a gossamer sheen envelopes the best of all his tales.



By accomplishing this remarkable feat, he created (as all genius must) something new and unique in the world's storehouse of original ideas. In his case it was a new kind of weird tale that had elements of science-fiction artfully and inextricably woven into the deeper currents of the unseen and the Outside. The result was neither science-fiction, nor weird fiction, nor supernatural fiction, but something different from all of these: in short, a Lovecraftian tale! The supreme resulting achievement! What we formerly called the supernatural was no longer so: it had now become merely the supernormal.

The conflict between science and religion is one of mankind's oldest wars. It probably started when one of our earliest ancestors found a new and better way of hunting and killing, or a new kind of food, drink or amusement that conflicted with the authority of the tribal priests. This inevitably led to the institution of taboo against this particular action. Thus the weight of the supernatural gods (with which the tribal priests were of course on the closest of terms) was thrown behind the ukases of these holy men.

An uninhibited analysis of medieval history inevitably leads to the conclusion that a great deal of the persecution of the so-called witches, wizards, warlocks and alchemists by the Church and State was prompted by a deadly fear of the unorthodox findings which some of these persons might have chanced upon in their gropings into the unknown.

Of course the classic example of true scientific spirit being throttled by ecclesiastical authority is the case of Galileo, which we all know by heart. No new words need be added to what the verdict of history has finally written on this shameful episode of human stupidity.

With the tremendous upsurge of scientific inquiry and invention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the terrific upheavals of our revolution and that of the French people; the spread of democratic ideas; the breaking up of the family unit of economy through the introduction of the factory system in the Industrial Revolution—is it any wonder that philosophy began to proclaim the Age of Reason? Voltaire and Diderot; Franklin and Paine; Hume, Dalton and Adam Smith were the new prophets. The mechanical principles of Galileo and Newton in astronomy and physics were confirmed in chemistry by Lavoisier. Laplace introduced his famous nebular hypothesis. Malthus capped it all with his essay on population in 1798. Since Lovecraft tried to immerse himself in this eighteenth century and felt he was really an outsider, stranded in space and time, who really belonged in that turbulent era, is it any wonder that he professed himself a mechanistic materialist?

The old conflict reached its apogee with Darwin and the publication of his Origin of Species in 1859. The doctrine of evolution seemed to cut the last props from under the already shaky edifice of supernatural gods and established religion. Darwin, Huxley, Drummond and many others were all participants in that last great battle.

Today we know that the mechanistic philosophy of life is hopelessly inadequate and outdated. The old fashioned conception of science indeed made it absolutely irreconcilable with religion and the supernatural. If the universe and man alike were ruled by immutable, absolute laws there is an inevitable clash in any reasonable mind when it tries



to envision at the same time the existence of a power which can at will set aside or operate in variance with these laws. Present-day science in its ultimate conceptions spills over into the realm of metaphysics—it is unavoidable. In the last analysis, the complete validity of our scientific knowledge is seriously open to question.

Einstein and relativity; Planck and the quantum theory; Bohr and Compton and the later investigators whose electronic research shows that ultimately the heart of the sub-atomic particle may be only pure energy; Heisenberg and Schroedinger and the principle of indeterminacy; Millikan and the cosmic rays; the modern interpreters like Jeans and Eddington; Dunne, with his serial time and serial universe—all these combine to show us that our final knowledge of the worlds around us is, to say the least, still very incomplete.

The principle of indeterminacy may indicate that our scientific laws in their ultimate conceptions are really mere statements of probability; statistical rules based on averages. The principles of relativity seem to show that while our picture of reality in our own space-time may be accurate enough for most practical purposes, it could be utterly at variance with the reality we might deduce from the same sort of tests and observations in another space-time. What pictures of reality might appear to the inhabitants of other galaxies or other dimensions of space and time brings us to the final conclusion that there may be no such thing as Absolute Reality.

Granting this, there is no reason why we should be slavishly bound to strict scientific law in our broadest conceptions of the universe, and the door is thus left open for a renaissance of personal faith in the supernatural based on our individual intuitions and inclinations.

Now, Lovecraft was cognizant of all that has been sketched in the lines above, but he also realized that we live in a world in which heat, light, gravitation, electricity, etc., do seem to follow definite laws of action that remain quite stable from day to day. Unless we are to abandon all reason, we must take this fact into account. After all, the modern reader of his stories would be bound to have a fair scientific background: this reader couldn't tolerate very many of the old-fashioned Gothic trappings of the ghost, werewolf and vampire per se. It takes a first rate artist today to make us grant even a half-hour's credence to these relics of yesterday, and after that we dismiss the tale with a shrug and a smile. Clearly, a new approach and wider horizons are required.

Lovecraft was possessed of an enormous spirit of sensitivity and almost boundless imagination, so it seems quite probable that he shrank from the full implications of a universe governed by mere blind force, particularly with his intuitive feeling for the weird and the unseen. So, therefore, I venture to suggest that his brilliant mind resolved all of these difficulties by a new concept of the spectral tale; a synthetic attitude into which grew inevitably the mythos of super-normal, scientifically conceived gods and associated lore to take the place in literature of the simon-pure supernatural and more strictly poetical gods of our past days.

I think we can sense this immediately upon the first perusal of his best works, although realization does not come until after meditation and considerable re-reading. The atmosphere of a clear rationalism overhangs all of the story-telling; something of the mechanistic belief sur-



vives in the concept of Fate as ruling the action of both man and gods. Neither of these, however, subordinate a complete grasp of present-day scientific and philosophical outlook. Mingled throughout is the sense of terror from vast, unseen things and psychological horror of the creeping menace of unimaginable entities from outside.

The objection may be made that the finished product is only pure terror; that the creations of the mythos are almost universally malignant, or, at best, indifferent towards man's fate. This cannot be avoided: all the main currents of the supernatural in the past have had the prime effect of making us uncomfortable. A scientist of today can conceive the universe as peopled by blind forces which have no concern with the human race, but for the purposes of literature this attitude is too static, too dead: we must have conflict of purposes and emotions to make a story. We must personify these forces in some manner to make them intelligible to the reader, and we are forced to make them inimical to mankind's aspirations and progress in order to have the interesting elements of struggle and survival. If we postulated all the powers of the galaxies as simply united in working towards our objectives, the outcome would be merely a lazy complacency of mind, even granting we could hurdle the patent absurdity and puerile infantilism of such an idea. It could not be expected that a modern scientific integration with the supernatural would help to flatter us to any extent when we consider the utter vastness of our present conceptions of space and time, and man's paltry insignificance in the midst of it.

Science-fiction had already seen most of its best days when Lovecraft began seriously to write: he was just a couple of decades ahead of the bulk of the writing world in sensing this fact. Of course the reason for this beginning of decadence was, ironically enough, that legitimate science had almost caught up with the best visions of our "scientifiction" writers. This type of story in the past had always had a punch because it was so breathlessly futuristic: it related of times so far ahead that readers in this ordinary world were filled with heady inspirations and dazzling dreams of the great scientific Utopia to come. Now, the products of research bid fair to outstrip the finest imaginings of our visionaries in literature. Just one instance: we can no longer be expected to read wide-eyed about rocket trips to other planets when modern armies, in conducting military operations, are already on the very fringes of that stage of development. The fictional prophets have been vindicated, of course, but unfortunately they stand in danger of being superceded by the news items in our daily papers! Perhaps not immediately—today—but the shadows are on the horizon, and unless we discover a few new geniuses of the stature of the early H. G. Wells, it would appear that the writing of "scientifiction" will continue its steady decline. We are doomed to be progressively bored and annoyed by the stale rehashing of ideas that once seemed daring and con-distant in the first quarter of this century. Of course, some may say: What of Olaf Stapledon? Unfortunately, in this writer's present estimation, Stapledon—at least in his two most significant works Starmaker and Last and First Men—has not written fiction in any true sense of that word. These volumes are crammed with magnificent ideas and concepts, but they read like history texts—albeit very fantastic



ones! They will undoubtedly be prime source-books for future writers; granting the emergence of new geniuses to elaborate portions of this material into colorful and dramatic story form, we may yet have a renaissance of science-fiction; let us all hope so! Incidentally, Stapledon's treatment of the superman theme in Odd John is excellent, and may well point the ways towards future elaborations he intends to make of his master works. And Sirius, his latest novel, is an able delving into psychological subtleties from a most unexpected view point. Stapledon may well tell the whole tale of cosmic history in readable form if given time.

Another dark portent in the minds of thinkers, however, is the beginning of a sad loss of faith in science as the final arbiter of human progress and welfare. Unless and until war and human greed are conquered, it does not seem that piling more and more gadgets and conveniences on us will help to cure the fundamental faults of human nature. We come inevitably to the distasteful conclusion that a man of the future subsisting on vitamin pellets, week-ending on Venus or Mars, and arming himself with atomic disintegrators or cosmic-ray guns would be even less pleasant to live with than a twentieth century human being unless there were a concurrent improvement in his cooperative abilities and basic nature. The present day revelation of collectivism in all the horrors of its several forms makes us shrink from the vision of scientific Utopia, a regimented bee-hive of civilization in which all life would be conducted on the latest principles of research, and wherein we would all have to live as supermen—whether we wanted to or not. Wells must bear a large share of the blame for attempting to foist this unpalatable concept of a brave new world upon us in his later works. The optimists, of course, brush all these doubts aside with light-hearted assurance that man will become better as his world becomes more and more scientifically controlled: but history has thus far not justified their faith. We have made the world infinitely smaller, but the main result has been to bring the other fellow just that much closer to our bomb-sights.

However that may be, in Lovecraft's view the decline and fall of old time science-fiction seemed not to far distant. He revived and rescued the best elements of it by marrying them to the older concepts of the supernatural and the weird, and today, of course, we recognize the resulting synthesis as the Lovecraftian attitude.

The writer hopes that this discussion will provoke plenty of thought, discussion and controversy; certainly everyone should think for himself on all of the aspects involved. Hence, no attempt will be made at too exhaustive an analysis of any one phase: many of the confirmed Lovecraftians who may have the patience to read this article will have decidedly different opinions, and that is all to the good. If these words can help only in suggesting some new lines of thought on the subject of Lovecraft's genius its purpose will have been nobly fulfilled.

Let us now consider how rational and scientific an aura surrounds much of the apparently wild and fantastic events in his works; and let us note precisely why his stories satisfy our intuitive love of the supernatural, yet do little violence, in their fictional medium, to our scientific background of knowledge.



In "Dagon" we have the most concise and perhaps the best expression of the whole Lovecraftian credo. The account is factual and circumstantial; the idea of a submarine upheaval in the ocean's floor is plausible. That such an eventuation might produce evidence of a lost race does not seem impossible. Our credulity is strained, of course, when we get intimations that the 'people' must have been a pre-human race of aquatic men who worshipped a fish-god, but by then the story's spell has captured us. Over it all hangs the awareness of the terrible and acknowledged antiquity of the earth and man's tenuous sinecure thereon. The final horror (if it is not really the narrator's own madness) is certainly little enough license to allow the writer of such a splendid tale.

The whole comment might with even greater certitude be made on that key-stone of the whole mythos: the longer, more definitive, and among the greatest of Lovecraft's stories, "The Call of Cthulhu". Here, a complete city is heaved up from the ocean's floor: unholy and eon-cursed R'lyeh wherein lie great Cthulhu and his minions, lord of the waters and his cohorts—perhaps only hibernating for the nonce. In this same story we learn the details from varied sources of the ancient and shocking cult of Cthulhu which has existed since earliest pre-human ages. Since we do know vaguely of mysterious cults that have lurked in the background of human history since earliest antiquity, the evidence as it is unfolded has a certain air of verisimilitude. Cthulhu and his followers are material beings (of a very peculiar sort, it must be granted) and they do not seem to be all-powerful, else they would not remain dreaming in their slimy prison. The air of bland factuality and cosmic horror is nicely balanced; the tale cannot but impress the critical reader.

We hear more of Dagon in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth". Clearly, Dagon, one of Cthulhu's entourage, was worshipped by the degenerate aquatic-human hybrids who infested and ruled accursed Innsmouth.

The tremendous adventures of Randolph Carter as detailed in the splendid episodic novel—"The Silver Key," "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" and "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath"—are fine conceptions of events in other dimensions of space and time which are surely not too basic an improbability as fiction in the light of our present-day speculations on relativity and serial time.

In a tale almost as detailed and circumstantial as the works of Defoe, "The Whisperer in Darkness," we have one of Lovecraft's supreme horror stories which yet has a certain amount of quasi-scientific background—enough for fictional purposes, it would seem.

It is in that superb creation, "The Shadow Out of Time," however, that Lovecraft really rose to the heights. Here we have the finest exposition of our planet's terrifying age; we have a rational discourse on relativity; the time displacement angle is handled in a masterly fashion; and above all we have almost the ultimate zenith in physical terror and psychical horror. This tale is far from being the most popular among readers, but after long consideration, this writer cannot but place it at the top: it appears to meet all possible requirements and tests.

Dulled in effect by its length, perhaps, but almost as great in its own way is the novel "At the Mountains of Madness." The acknowledged evidence of one-time tropical climate at the poles is used to bolster



a magnificent and frightening account of the discovery of the ruins of a pre-human civilization of unimaginable antiquity in the Antarctic. Behind hitherto-undiscovered mountains, incredibly high, lurks this vast hulk. Within its dead walls is sculptured the history of a mighty race and its decadence and final downfall. The fact that underground there are—capable of being revived by heat—remnants of the creatures that destroyed this elder race is not too scientifically implausible (as fiction) in the light of what we know today about quick-freezing, hibernation and the innate toughness of some lower species of animal life.

There is even a very thin scientific justification for the events in the series of horror episodes entitled "Herbert West: Reanimator," although the quality of this writing is definitely inferior to much of Lovecraft's best.

Aside from all that has just been written, however, it would appear that the basic reaction which occurs in the reader's mind is the final and most important point. When we think of Azathoth as ruling all space and time at the center of Ultimate Chaos, we do not experience the same feeling as did we when confronted by the vague, spiritual entities of older supernaturalism. We feel somehow that Azathoth is explicable in terms of modern astronomy and physics. He seems nearer to our rational scientific minds than the misty ghosts and purely spiritual forces of a past age. It is perhaps worth repeating that this is the leit-motif of Lovecraft's peculiar art, the core of his philosophy of the weird: that all these vast and mysterious aspects of the universe around us should be regarded in the light of the supernormal rather than the supernatural. It is perhaps even better exemplified by our feelings toward the physical monstrosities, the blasphemous abnormalities of structure, appendage, etc., as encountered in so many of the mythos tales. We feel that these strange and abhorrent creatures are not mere nightmare denizens of the Pit (as in the old supernaturalism) but rather conceivable products of a process of biological evolution that might have taken place in an utterly alien cosmos under conditions which an earth-dweller could scarcely comprehend.

Only a few suggestive examples have been given from the mass of Lovecraft's work; whole books could be easily written if and when a definitive critical analysis were attempted. Some of the most popular stories such as "Pickman's Model," "The Colour Out of Space," "The Dunwich Horror," "The Rats in the Walls," "The Music of Erich Zann," "The Temple," "The Thing on the Doorstep," and others have not been specifically referred to merely because it is felt that confirmed Lovecraftians, if they feel that the ideas and opinions herein expressed may provide a slight trace of a new and fresh viewpoint, may like the intellectual entertainment of re-analysing some of these tales for themselves. It would seem that enough has been cited to give those who are interested an opportunity to trace down evidences of confirmation or rebuttal should they feel so inclined.

The importance of Lovecraft's style has been a point of some discussion among its devotees. Of course, the similarity to Poe's was immediate and self evident: Lovecraft himself admitted that Poe and Dunsany had the greatest influence on his writings. We readily discern the same Poesque elements of morbidity, extravagant phraseology, melodramatics



and sombre atmosphere. However, while Poe was an infinitely greater writer in a strict literary sense, we can say that Lovecraft had imagination equally as fertile; in addition he had the benefit of three generations of scientific research and the philosophical speculation arising therefrom. These same generations saw an almost complete revolution in our conceptions of the universe; they opened up endless vistas for the human mind to explore, and they could not help giving Lovecraft material to draw upon of which Poe could never have dreamt.

Lovecraft's works can be characterized by saying that they are a blend of Poesque style, Dunsanian fantasy and contain a dash of Wellsian scientific realism—but this conveys nothing without a consideration of the catalyst: the genius of Lovecraft's total cosmic viewpoint. This causes all the elements to combine into that superb compound: the Lovecraftian story. This compound gives off the characteristic, peculiar aura that we all recognize: the creeping horror of the menace from Outside.

The Lovecraftian influence is most noticeable in the mood reflected in the reader's mind. That is why his stories can be re-read countless times and still appear fresh and interesting. Characterization is negligible; devices and mechanics of plot are far from unique; yet again and again we are drawn back by the description and the atmosphere. Obviously, those who reread him must enjoy the moods engendered: upon each new perusal the old mood is recreated, yet each time it is never quite the same. Sometimes one aspect seems high-lighted; sometimes it seems foreshortened and another facet is emphasized. The stories are thus a teeming source of countless, varied moods and never seem stale lifeless, or too familiar.

What of Lovecraft's influence on the future of the weird tale? We know that so far his works have had a very definite bearing on some of the writings of August Derleth, Donald Wandrei, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, Frank Belknap Long, Hazel Heald, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, Zealia Bishop, and others. Certainly we can trace an apparent Lovecraftian influence in the two fine novels of William Sloane, To Walk the Night and The Edge of Running Water; both of which deal with menace from the Outside: the first of an alien intelligence possessing a human body, and the second, the tremendous, dark forces lurking beyond the barriers of our familiar dimensions.

Lovecraft's brilliant and revolutionary idea of integrating the most worthwhile elements of a decadent science-fiction with the best concepts of the supernatural and the weird would seem to be enough to guarantee an indelible impression being made on the minds of all future writers in the genre. In addition, however, he left the superb concept of the mythos to which several writers have already made additional contributions. When Lovecraft died, the mythos was admittedly incomplete: unquestionably, had he lived only a decade longer he would have widened and deepened its scope to tremendous extent. Certainly no future writer in this domain of literature can afford to be ignorant of the mythos with its pantheon of supernormal gods who are more acceptable to a generation with a modern scientific background than the older, Gothic, purely supernatural deities and powers of darkness and



light. Filling in the gaps and extending the sweep of the mythos should provide an inspiration for at least those select few who are capable of carrying it forward.

Finally, as if this were not enough, he left a considerable reservoir of basic plot-material for future writers in the associated lore of the mythos and in the dark portents hinted at in "The Ancient Track" and "Fungi from Yuggoth," which should be limited in development only by the imagination and the ingenuity of a generation yet to come.

Think of the stories that yet remain to be written about witch-cursed Arkham, and degenerate Innsmouth! And since R'yleh presumably will not rise again from the ocean floor until eons have passed and the stars are right once more, what is to prevent us from making a submarine expedition to its cyclopean, slimy-green ramparts in the Pacific deep? Inspiration for mythos tales lies all around us: even the writer of this article has a fairly complete mental synopsis of a gripping story based on an unusual local character and his mysterious habitation which derives directly from influence of the Lovecraftian viewpoint.

In conclusion, this same writer awaits with the keenest of anticipation the momentous day when some hardy Latin scholar decides to take up the fabled Olaus Wormius edition of the forbidden book, and brings forth to the startled world a translation of the Necronomicon — unabridged and unexpurgated—into English blank verse!











